

## Sixth Sunday of Easter Reflection

*"I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you for ever."*

He *will* give you – future tense for them

Waiting is always hard, even on a sunny day in a nice garden.

Our dog, Jasper, for instance, on the film we shot, banged his paw down impatiently on the table, and showed by what R.M. Ballantyne calls "the language of the eyes" that it is far from easy for a dog to wait for his treats.:

Not too bad for Jasper. No dogs were hurt in the making of that video.

But for the disciples in this passage, they don't know it yet, but very hard waiting is in store... They *don't* know it yet; hasn't Thomas after all just pointed out that they don't know where Jesus is going so how *can* they follow (John.14..5). He is thinking ordinance survey while Jesus is speaking crucifixion. They are not on the same plane.

So, Jesus in this passage in John 14 is preparing them for traumatic waiting of which they cannot yet conceive. The week after Easter we heard of the disciples sitting traumatised and fearful in a locked room-like bewildered orphans- in John ch.20 having seen their friend killed cruelly, betrayed by Judas Iscariot and denied Peter. Now with their dreams apparently dashed, their lives turned upside down, and probably feeling the guilt that bereavement often brings, and not yet believing in the Resurrection that has happened they are very likely also afraid that they will be killed too.

Jesus foresaw this. John's gospel is always stressing how Jesus has knowledge of people, and of what they are thinking. He also has some knowledge of what will happen. So here he is preparing them. for that time.

We too are at a time of trauma, waiting for the world to be restored to a new normal.

So, what do you need when you are in a time of traumatised waiting?

Imagine yourself if you will in a claustrophobic house, surrounded by leylandii that have reached their full height, blocking off all the sunlight. It shouldn't be too hard at present. You need a good lawyer, a comforter, and some guidance, and a promise of life and sunlight restored.

And all those things come under the heading of that interesting word "paraclete" (John 14.16) which is variably given as Comforter, Advocate, Counsellor and Helper.

[John Muddiman](#) and [John Barton](#) further explain the development of the meaning of this term;

The word *parakletos* is... used of one called to help in a lawcourt. In the Jewish tradition the word was transcribed with Hebrew letters and used for angels, prophets, and the just as advocates before God's court. The word also acquired the meaning of 'one who consoles'.. The word is

filled with a complex meaning: the Spirit replaces Jesus, is an advocate and a witness, but also consoles the disciples.

When that passage said “replaces Jesus” it is meant as physical imagery, since we know from John 14.7 that we can know the character of the Father by looking at who Jesus is “If you know me you will know my Father also..” The Holy Spirit which indwells the believer has the same character.

We are called to become more and more fully that character. When the Spirit indwells us we too will go out to others as comforter, advocate, helper, and counsellor, especially in these coronavirus times, just as a good tree bears good fruit.

The Book of Acts, very well worth a read-more accurately several reads if not many- shows many of the glorious out-workings of the Spirit, after the Holy Spirit had stirred up these works of comfort, advocacy, help and guidance. The previously cowed disciples discovered that the Holy Spirit like Jesus can walk through walls and they became courageous and faithful. They realised that neither is the Spirit confined nor rightly claimed as the exclusive preserve of certain “in” groups, but openly, freely, and dynamically available for all who are willing.

In St Peter's we can see pictured in walls and glass, the day of Pentecost (Acts 2) with tongues of flame descending on the disciples and we can also see St Peter's healing of the crippled man at the Golden Gate: “silver and gold have I none, but what I have give I thee. In the Name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth stand up and walk” .(Acts 3.6 ) That healing shows the work of the Spirit as helper and comforter, and a countercultural guide that challenges us towards the truth that money is key neither to life nor health, as we can so often mistakenly join in believing.

And in today's reading the latecomer Apostle, Paul, in his speech to the A|reopagus (Act 17) shows us the Spirit as one who comes alongside in the proclamation of the Gospel, the good news that Jesus died for us and rose again. He doesn't antagonise by telling them their culture is just wrong, but finds a desire towards God that he can nurture in the right direction. A picture of this is alongside the pulpit in St Peter's to keep preachers remembering to meet people where they are. All the pictures are carefully placed!

And we can't miss out the vital witness of the disciples who emboldened by the Spirit laid down their lives for their Lord, transformed from the frightened beings that they had once been, and in chapter 7 of the Book of Acts the first martyr, Stephen, gives a passionate advocacy for Christ in words followed by the advocacy of his death, which to many future generations has been a help, a comfort and a guide.

Stephen, Paul, Peter, and all the other disciples who went to their deaths understood that the Holy Spirit is the same spirit that raised Jesus from the grave, not a spirit of fear, but one

of life, of power and energy that overcomes all the forces of evil and death, and that by its nature overflows onto others. The Spirit cannot be contained nor defeated, as, visually mirrored in a phenomenon whereby if one puts on a pair of protective glasses so one don't lose an eye and slip a mystery ingredient in a bottle of brown fizzy stuff (don't try this at home without the say-so of a deeply sensible person- we had to 'make do' under lockdown on this one!

There – a commentary on Acts.

That illustrates the Creation and Resurrection power of the Spirit which galvanised the fearful disciples to witness fearlessly to the world of the death and resurrection of their living Lord.

Let us end with a prayer:

Almighty Father, may we be guided and infused by your Holy Spirit of Comfort, Advocacy, Help, and Counsel, that we might comfort, help and counsel others, advocate for the poor and needy, and advocate for our faith to the glory of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,

In the name of Jesus, Amen.

